Vegetarianism—An Aspect of Peace

BY

Mrs. JOSEPHINE RANSOM

THREEPENCE

THE VEGETARIAN SOCIETY
(Established 1847)
MANCHESTER

THE VEGETARIAN SOCIETY

was established in 1847

"to induce habits of abstinence from the flesh of animals as food, and thus to secure the adoption of a principle which will tend essentially to true civilization, to universal brotherhood, and to the increase of human happiness generally."

The Society contends that a vegetarian dietary is preferable to one that includes flesh-meat as being more humane, more conducive to good health, and, at the same time, more simple and economical. All vegetarians are invited to become members. Those who, while agreeing with the principles of the Society, are not themselves vegetarians, are invited to become associates. THE VEGETARIAN MESSENGER AND HEALTH REVIEW (1849) is sent post free to members and associates. The minimum annual subscription is: Adults, 5/-; under 21 years of age, 2/6; under 16 years of age, 1/-; Life Membership, £10 10 0.

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By Mrs. Josephine Ransom

IN order to understand the right place of vegetarianism in a happy world-order, it is necessary, first, to discuss the problem of Peace, Too often Peace is taken to mean but the cessation of hostilities, of military conflicts, of struggles based on the destruction of human beings and their works. When a conflict ceases, through the superiority of one side or the other of the combatants, we are apt to imagine we can then pursue our daily interests once more—be those interests large or small—with the same ease as was more or less common previous to the war.

But Peace no longer wears an aspect of ease, of freedom from struggle. We are aware that the wars of to-day, in their scope and intensity, are leaving us with a completely new set of problems, with vast human needs to consider, with misery and suffering on a scale hitherto undreamed of. We are indeed being landed in a new world, and on its threshold one must pause to determine what are to be the foundations of the new order to be established, so that in the centuries to come it will be seen that we had in us something of true vision, of pity for suffering, of strength valiantly to right wrongs, of spiritual insight to realize all Life is One ; that where we injure one we injure all ; where we cause one to suffer, all suffer ; where we give happiness to the few, all are made happy ; where we love those nearest to us, all are loved and made glad.

Vegetarian books and publications stress this or that aspect of the immense value of a vegetarian form of diet for the human race. I want here to stress human *attitudes* towards such a diet. I want it to appear, if I can, how such a diet has ramifications on a scale we, perhaps, little thought of at first—that it is, after all one of the very important foundation stones upon which real Peace may be securely built. Practice of such a diet will transform many of our careless, thoughtless habits into thoughtful care in what we are doing. We will see life as a whole, and not in bits and pieces that seem unrelated.

We are apt to lump humanity as a whole and to consider that the rights and duties of all are somewhat similar ; that the ideals which appeal to one group should appeal to all. But the values current in each group may clash with those of another, and none more than in the whole question of man's relation to the kingdoms lower in the evolutionary scale than his own. The majority of humans simply—for one reason or another—look upon these kingdoms as entirely at their mercy, to be ruthlessly exploited in human interests.

First, because so much authority and leadership are involved, we should consider the Western " religious attitude " towards vegetarianism. " Thou shalt not kill " was the stern, unqualified command of Moses, the ancient law-giver. But wars went on

among Hebrew tribes and nations, and, even in the time of Jesus the great temple at Jerusalem ran red with the blood of sacrificed animals whose carcasses were eaten by priests and laity alike. At the same time went up the human petition to the God supposed to be pleased and His wrath placated by such sacrifices—" Give Peace in our time, O Lord." Man dreads and bewails injury and suffering to himself, and demands their cessation even by the offering of animal scapegoats. Only awakened *spiritual* vision sees how peace and happiness can be brought about through mercy to all living things.

" Kill not, for pity's sake," counselled the Buddha. He, too, added no qualifications to his counsel. But many a war has been waged by Buddhists for reasons of greed or power, and many a Buddhist argues that there is no command against eating what someone else has killed. So the suffering which the Buddha so specifically tried to lessen goes on.

In many a temple in India, animal sacrifices are offered to propitiate hungry, malevolent " gods " who might otherwise wreak mischief upon their devotees. Both priests and laity partake of the sacrificial food. There is not so much vegetarianism in India as is usually supposed, even among the Hindus. India is still said to be the *largest* exporter of hides in the world. So the suffering goes on.

The same is true of other religions, great and small, with here and there an exception where a human group is humbly dedicated to refraining from flesh-food—very often out of compassion for creatures finding their slow way up the difficult path of evolution, and not only for the preservation of personal purity.

But we need to examine Christian points of view, for in Christian lands we take it to ourselves to consider that we are the civilized leaders of the future, and we are already claiming, each in turn, that we are the " natural " leaders to the delectable lands of Peace. We know there are large numbers of Christians who hold that since animals have no souls, that as they are put under the " dominion " of man, he can do entirely what he wishes with them. Having no souls, it is said, animals do not suffer. But whether animals have souls or not, they have obviously a considerable sentient capacity, and therefore capacity for suffering. We have argued ourselves into believing that animals are our natural food, and for that purpose they are bred and killed in incredible numbers every day. Also, they are mercilessly exploited for all the other products which we use in vast quantities—for clothing, industry, medicine, etc. Without these products, our lives would be bare indeed of what we term necessities. In times of " Peace " all this goes on apace ; we spare the animals nothing, and even increase our demands that we may have new comforts at their expense. In war-time they are even more disregarded, and their own love of life and contentment seem as nothing compared with the maintenance of our own bodily existence. Such bodily existence has for the majority an importance outweighing every other consideration. The truth that all life is one is lost sight of. Here is a verse that recalls to us this spiritual verity:

" O Hidden Life vibrant in every atom,
O Hidden Light shining in every creature,
O Hidden Love embracing all in oneness,
May each who feels himself as one with Thee,
Know he is therefore one with every other."

Also, it is argued as a plea for the continuance of a flesh diet that Jesus was presumably not a vegetarian, since in the reputed incident of the loaves and fishes he had no scruple in supplying fishes for the multitude. Maybe—but I have yet to meet the truly spiritual person who is not a vegetarian. Compassion alone would lead him or her to such a diet. Non-vegetarian saints who have experienced spiritual ecstasies are sometimes brought into the argument. But I am convinced that had their diet been different they would have been sounder in health and far more capable of bearing the great nervous strain that spiritual practices involve. They probably did not realize how very important it is that the vessel which is to hold the powerful stream of spiritual force must be utterly clean lest it break under the strain. They did not think of matching the love and mercy they implored of God with love and mercy shown to the humbler creatures dumb in their many miseries and agonies. Perhaps it never occurred to them that the miseries which we inflict on the animal kingdom react upon us all, irrespective of our human status. The unheeded cry of pain from that kingdom confuses human issues, clouds thought, and hampers our own efforts to reach spiritual awareness.

Is it too much to ask of those who claim to have the world's spiritual guidance in their hands, that they should take the lead in this quest for clean food, which involves no bloodshed, inflicts no pain, but instead directs how to back up the divine instruction to have for our " meat," every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed . . . " ? It is not as though there were any lack of information on the use and value of this " meat." The whole subject has been gone into thoroughly and scientifically, and no one need plead ignorance—even though they might put forward the lazy plea of inconvenience.

We are not unaware of the far-reaching issues involved in the question of a clean diet. Think of the tremendous traffic there is in animal life ; how countries, groups, individuals, count their wealth in terms of the number of animals they deal with. It would mean dislocation of finance, of industry, of employment, and even of romance. For, strange though the word " romance " may seem in this connexion, one has only to remember the long treks, in Australia for instance, of the drovers with their sensitive herds, so ready to stampede, to know how daring are such treks.

But as we grow more aware of what we are demanding as the accompaniment of Peace, we must face all this change in habit and occupation. We need have no fear that it would come about all at once and cause human distress, for we have only to realize how slowly we can convince the millions that such a change is to their advantage, and not merely a fad or a fancy of

the few who can be ignored. Those who can be induced to look deeper, will soon see that it is no fad, no inexpedient measure, but a profound truth that we must plan our relation to the animal world upon a totally different civilized and merciful basis. How do leaders in the van of civilization intend to deal out the future of these creatures who are helpless in our hands? We are told "God so loved the world" that he sent His Son not to condemn the world but to save it. That "light" came into the world because the deeds of men were evil, and he who hates the light does so because he fears lest his deeds be reproved. He who loves the truth lets his deeds show that they are wrought in God.* "Peace on earth" is not an instruction for man only, but includes all that feels and reaches out after understanding and love and mercy.

Maybe there are many who are not convinced that vegetarianism is a vital necessity, who think that other things should come first—the rectification of our social order, our political order, our financial order, out intellectual outlook. But I say that whatever the views on these and other matters, they take a secondary place when compared with the values of the laws of love and friendliness shown towards all the world.

I would suggest that those who for some reason or another find it difficult to adopt a vegetarian diet should register their determination to do so as soon as possible. The way will open sooner or later when the will is set in a certain direction. The love of God makes increasingly easy the decisions of those who are dedicated to the works of love and mercy. By deliberately declaring for a state of mercy and compassion they assist in bringing to pass that Peace which at present passes our understanding.

That true Peace is the world's dear beacon, who will deny? That Peace has its source in a "Unity" that lies as a jewel in the hearts of all creatures, all will confess; and having confessed, will thrill to the idea that it can be a new and fuller revelation of the Divine Nature in its harmonious grandeur. Maybe no one has put more richly this suggestion of a new revealing than F. W. H. Myers in his *St. Paul*. Vegetarians might take it to themselves that they do stand on "this side" where love and pity and sympathy are actively at work to mitigate the sorrows of the kingdom of animals. Myers writes:

> Scarcely I catch the words of his revealing,
> Hardly I hear him, dimly understand,
> Only the Power that is within me pealing
> Lives on my lips and beckons to my hand.
>
> Whoso hath felt the Spirit of the Highest
> Cannot confound nor doubt him nor deny:
> Yea with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,
> Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

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* See St. John, chapter 3, verses 16-20.

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